

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEL AV 05732 01 OF 02 081027Z

11

ACTION NEA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SSO-00 PM-03 IO-03 INR-10 NSCE-00

NSC-07 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DRC-01 L-02 PRS-01 /048 W

----- 037230

O R 080719Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4133

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBSSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBSSY JIDDA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 5732

LIMDIS

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, XF

SUBJECT: ISRAEL AND WEST BANK: RABIN EXERTS LEADERSHIP

1. SUMMARY: RABIN STATEMENT OF OCT 1 SUGGESTING POSSIBILITY OF INTERIM SETTLEMENT ON WEST BANK (COMPLEMENTED OCT 4 BY FONMIN ALLON NY TIMES INTERVIEW RAISING PROSPECT OF ISRAELI ACQUIESCENCE IN JORDAN/WESTBANK FEDERATION) HAS FOCUSED ISRAELI ATTENTION ON REAL FACTORS THAT MAY BE INVOLVED IN WEST BANK NEGOTIATIONS. AS SUCH, IT IS CONTINUATION OF GOI EFFORT TO EDUCATE ISRAELI PEOPLE SINCE RABIN RETURN FROM US LAST MONTH. PREDICTABLY, IT HAS ALSO AROUSED ADVERSE REACTION, BUT ONE WHICH IS PROBABLY MANAGEABLE. ALTHOUGH SPECIAL KNESSET SESSION HAS BEEN CALLED OCT 9 TO DEBATE STATEMENT NRP IS PROBABLY TOO ANXIOUS TO JOIN GOVERNMENT TO FORCE SHOWDOWN AND LIKUD CAN DO NO MORE AT PRESENT THAN ACHIEVE REAFFIRMATION BY GOVT OF EXISTING COMMITMENT TO TAKE EVENTUAL WEST BANK AGREEMENT INVOLVING TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS TO ELECTORATE. MEANWHILE, RABIN HAS TAKEN INITIATIVE ON WEST BANK NEGOTIATIONS AND HAS CONVEYED MESSAGE THAT HE MAY BE WILLING

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 05732 01 OF 02 081027Z

TO TALK TO HUSSEIN(BUT NOT PLO) ABOUT

PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL. END SUMMARY.

2. STATEMENT BY PM RABIN OCT 1 IN "TODAY" SHOW INTERVIEW THAT ISRAEL WOULD CONSIDER POSITIVELY A SERIOUS JORDANIAN DECLARATION OF NON-BELLIGERENCY IS ONLY MOST CONTROVERSIAL IN SERIES OF POLICY STATEMENTS RABIN HAS MADE SINCE HIS RETURN FROM US. PURPOSE OF THESE STATEMENTS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN PRIMARILY TO EDUCATE ISRAELI PUBLIC TO NEW FACTS OF MIDDLE EAST LIFE (AS SEEN BY PM) AND TO PREPARE PUBLIC FOR HARD DECISIONS WHICH GOI MUST TAKE IF NEGOTIATIONS ARE TO PROCEED. IN THIS, RABIN HAS DRAWN ON HIS ENHANCED STATUS AS RESULT OF SUCCESS OF WASHINGTON TALKS, AND HAS USED VARIETY OF MEDIA SOURCES TO SPEAK DIRECTLY TO PEOPLE, IN EFFECT OVER HEADS OF POTENTIAL DISSENTERS AMONG ACTIVE POLITICIANS. RESULT IS THAT RABIN IS NOW EXERTING INDEPENDENT LEADERSHIP AND GRADUALLY BREAKING WITH FORMER GOVT ON FOREIGN POLICY, ALTHOUGH KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS NOTE HE IS PRUDENTLY KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH BOTH MRS MEIR AND PARTY GURU SAPIR. "TODAY" SHOW INTERVIEW, WITH ITS UNEXPECTED SHIFT IN WEST BANK POLICY, SUGGESTS THAT RABIN IS MORE CONFIDENT THAN PREVIOUSLY OF SECURITY OF HIS DOMESTIC POSITION.

3. MOST REACTIONS TO STATEMENT HAVE BEEN UNFAVORABLE IN VARYING DEGREE, INDICATING THAT WEST BANK ISSUE CONTINUES TO EVOKE PECULIAR SENSITIVITY NOT ASSOCIATED WITH SINAI OR EVEN GOLAN HEIGHTS. CRITICAL COMMENTS RANGE ACROSS POLITICAL SPECTRUM, INCLUDING EVEN LABOR PARTY DOVE ELIAV, WHO EXPRESSED PUBLIC UNHAPPINESS WITH STATEMENT ON GROUNDS THAT SUCH CHANGE IN POLICY SHOULD HAVE FIRST BEEN DISCUSSED WITHIN PARTY. ON OTHER HAND, REACTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL POLITICIANS HAVE NOT BEEN AS VIGOROUS AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED FEW MONTHS AGO, GIVEN EMOTIONAL CONTENT OF JUDEA/SAMARIA ISSUE. (UNSURPRISING EXCEPTION HAS BEEN LIKUD (HERUT) LEADER BEGIN WHO, IN CALLING FOR KNESSET DEBATE, TERMED RABIN STATEMENT "MORALLY SHOCKING.")

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 05732 02 OF 02 081019Z

11

ACTION NEA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SSO-00 PM-03 IO-03 INR-10 NSC-07

NSCE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 L-02 PRS-01 DRC-01 /048 W

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O R 080719Z OCT 74
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4134
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 5732

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4. GIVEN FACT THAT WEST BANK STATEMENT ENTAILS A SIGNIFICANT BREAK WITH PAST PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF GOI POLICY (IF NOT NECESSARILY PRIVATE ONES), QUESTION ARISES AS TO RABIN'S MOTIVES, IN VIEW OF PREDICTABLE ADVERSE DOMESTIC REACTION. IT MAY BE THAT ABIN HAS CHOSEN PRESENT AS MOST ADVANTAGEOUS MOMENT TO ENHANCE HIS IMAGE AS INDEPENDENT LEADER, TO INCLUDE WEST BANK IN EDUCATION OF ISRAELI PUBLIC AND TO SEIZE NEGOTIATING INITIATIVE AT SAME TIME.

5. DOMESTICALLY, PRIMARY SUSTAINED OPPOSITION TO POSSIBILITY OF WITHDRAWAL FROM WEST BANK COULD BE EXPECTED FROM NRP AND HERUT WING OF LIKD. RABIN MAY ASSUME THAT NRP IS CURRENTLY SO ANXIOUS TO NAIL DOWN POSITION GOVERNMENT THAT IT WILL NOT JEOPARDIZE ITS CHANCES BY FORCING SHOWDOWN OVER HIGHLY CONDITIONAL FORMULATION. MOST LIKUD HAS BEEN ABLE TO DO AT THIS POINT IS TO DEMAND SPECIAL KNESSET SESSION (SCHEDULE FOR OCT 9), AT WHICH RABIN MAY BE COUNTING ON FAVORABLE PUBLIC JUDGMENT OF HIS OWN REASONED APPROACH AS COMPARED WITH ANTICIPATED IDEOLOGICAL STRIDENCY OF BEGIN. BEGIN ARGUMENTS MAY PROVE APPEALING IN SOME QUARTERS,
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 05732 02 OF 02 081019Z

BUT RABIN CAN REASON THAT GOI IS IN ANY CASE ALREADY COMMITTED TO GOING TO ELECTORATE PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTING AGREEMENT ON WEST BANK, PROSPECT WHICH REALISTICALLY IS NOT BROUGHT ALL THAT MUCH CLOSER BY HIS STATEMENT.

6. UNKNOWN QUANTITY THUS FAR IS FORMER DEFMIN DAYAN. IMPACT OF KNESSET SESSION COULD BE DETERMINED BY POSTURE HE ASSUMES AND BY WHETHER RAFI FACTION REMAINS UNIFIED BEHIND HIM. BUT OPPOSING RABIN AT THIS TIME WOULD BE RISKY FOR DAYAN AND WE HAVE SEEN NO SIGNS THAT HE INTENDS TO DO SO, ALTHOUGH AT LEAST ONE PRESS COMMENTATOR HAS SAID IT IS NOW TIME FOR DAYAN TO SPEAK UP OR FOREVER HOLD HIS PEACE.

7. AGAINST THIS BALANCE ON DOMESTIC FRONT, RABIN APPEARS TO GAIN POINTS IN CONTEXT OF REGIONAL NEGOTIATIONS. MOST IMPORTANTLY, RABIN HAS TAKEN INITIATIVE ON WEST BANK WHILE PLO IS TRYING TO COPE WITH DEFECTION OF EXTREMIST FACTIONS IS PREOCCUPIED BY ITS EFFORTS AT UNGA. MOREOVER, RABIN MAY BELIEVE THAT TIMING OF STATEMENT IS SUCH THAT DURING SECRETARY'S UPCOMING TRIP IT WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT FOR ARAB LEADERS TO ARGUE THAT ISRAELIS HAVE BEEN INTRANSIGENT RE WEST BANK. AND, SINCE STATEMENT IS OBVIOUSLY INTENDED AS SIGNAL TO HUSSEIN, ARAB LEADERS MUST ALSO CONFRONT FACT THAT IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN MADE WERE PLO ON RECEIVING END. RABIN MAY HOPE THAT ARABS WILL CONCLUDE THAT IF THEY WANT WEST BANK RETURNED, MEANS MUST BE FOUND TO ALLOW HUSSEIN TO DO THE TALKING.

8. ON BALANCE, IT SEEMS TO US THAT RABIN HAS TAKEN CALCULATED POLITICAL RISK TO LEAD ISRAELI PUBLIC ANOTHER STEP TOWARD REALITY WHILE AT SAME TIME GAINING INITIATIVE ON IMPORTANT ASPECT OF NEGOTIATING PICTURE. WE BELIEVE HE WILL WEATHER STORM IN KNESSET; MEANWHILE, HE CAN CONSIDER THAT WEST BANK BALL IS IN JORDANIAN COURT.
KEATING

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